APPARENT DEATH.

From All the Year Round.

Very lately, the present writer was requested to attend, on a Monday morning, the funeral of a lady sixty-seven years of age, the wife of the mayor of a small French town, who had died in the night between the Thursday and the Friday previous. On the company assembling, the cure informed us that the body would remain where it was for awhile, but that the usual ceremonies (except those at the cemetery) would be proceeded with all the same. We therefore followed him to the church, and had a funeral service without a burial. It transpired that the body was still quite warm, and presented no signs of decomposition.

In the ordinary course of things, this circumstance might not have prevented the interment; but the poor lady herself had requested not to be buried until decomposition should have begun beyond the possibility of mistake; and the family remembered, and regretted, that her brother had been put into the ground, three days after his death, while still warm, and with his countenance unchanged. They had occasionally felt uneasy about the matter, fearing that they might have been too precipitate in their proceedings. So in this case they resolved to take no irrevocable step without the full assurance of being justified in doing so. The corpse was kept uninterred long after every doubt was set at rest. Certainly we manage some things better in England than in France; amongst them being the interval allowed to elapse between death and interment. Still, there are circumstances and cases which, even here, afford matter for serious reflection. It will easily be supposed that the dangerous briefness of this interval has been urged upon the attention of the French Legislature, and been ably discussed by the French medical press. In 1866, a petition was presented to the Senate from a person named De Cornol, pointing out the danger of hasty interments, and suggesting the measures he thought requisite to avoid the terrible consequences. Amongst other things, he prayed that the space of twenty-four hours between the decease and the interment now prescribed by the law should be extended to eight-and-forty hours. A long debate followed, in which Cardinal Donnet, Archbishop of Bordeaux, took a leading part. He was decidedly of opinion that the petition should *not* be set aside by the "order of the day," but that it should be transmitted to the Minister of the Interior for further consideration and inquiry. Some of the venerable prelate's remarks produced so great an effect on his auditors as to merit particular mention. He said he had the very best reasons for believing that the victims of hasty interments were more numerous than people supposed. He considered the regulations on this head prescribed by the law as very judicious, but unfortunately they were not always executed as they should be, nor was sufficient importance attached to them. In the village where he was stationed as assistant curate in the first period of his sacerdotal life, he saved two persons from being buried alive. The first was an aged man, who lived twelve hours after the hour fixed for his interment by the municipal officer. The second was a man who was quite restored to life. In both these instances a trance more prolonged than usual was taken for actual death.

The next case in his experience occurred at Bordeaux. A young lady, who bore one of the most distinguished names in the department, had passed through what was believed to be her last agony, and as, apparently, all was over, the father and mother were torn away from the heartrending spectacle. At that moment, as God willed it, the cardinal happened to pass the door of the house, when it occurred to him to call and inquire how the young lady was going on. When he entered the room, the nurse, finding the body breathless, was in the act of covering the face, and indeed there was every appearance that life had departed. Somehow or other, it did not seem so certain to him as to the bystanders. He resolved to try. He raised his voice, called loudly upon the young lady not to give up all hope, said that he was come to cure her, and that he was about to pray by her side. "You do not see me," he said, "but you hear what I am saying." Those singular presentiments were not unfounded. The words of hope reached her ear and effected a marvellous change, or rather called back the life that was departing. The young girl survived, and in 1866 was a wife, the mother of children, and the chief happiness of two most respectable families.

The last instance related by the archbishop is so interesting, and made such a sensation, that it deserves to be given in his own words.

"In the summer of 1826, on a close and sultry day, in a church that was excessively crowded, a young priest who was in the act of preaching was suddenly seized with giddiness in the pulpit. The words he was uttering became indistinct; he soon lost the power of speech, and sank down upon the floor. He was taken out of the church, and carried home. Everybody thought that all was over. Some hours afterwards the funeral bell was tolled, and the usual preparations were made for the interment. His eyesight was gone; but if, like the young lady I have mentioned, he could see nothing, he could nevertheless hear; and I need not say that what reached his ears was not calculated to reassure him. The doctor came, examined him, and pronounced him dead; and after the usual inquiries as to his age, the place of his birth, etc., gave permission for his interment next morning. The venerable bishop, in whose cathedral the young priest was preaching when he was seized with the fit, came to his bedside to recite the De Profundis. The body was measured for the coffin. Night came on, and you will easily feel how inexpressible was the anguish of the living being in such a situation. At last, amid the voices murmuring around him, he distinguished that of one whom he had known from infancy. That voice produced a marvellous effect, and excited him to make a superhuman effort. Of what followed I need say no more than that the seemingly dead man stood next day in the pulpit, from which he had been taken for dead. That young priest, gentlemen, is the same who is now speaking before you, and who, more than forty years after that event, implores those in authority not merely to watch vigilantly over the careful execution of the legal prescriptions with regard to interments, but to enact fresh ones, in order to prevent the recurrence of irreparable misfortunes."

A remarkable pamphlet, "Lettre sur La Mort Apparente, Les Consequences Reeles des Inhumations Precipitees, et Le Temps Pendant lequel peut persister L'Aptitude a etre Rappele a la Vie," by the late regretted Dr. Charles Londe, records accidents which are more likely than the preceding to occur in England. Even were the bathing season not at hand, deaths by drowning are always to be apprehended. We therefore cite the following.—

On the 13th of July, 1829, about two o'clock in the afternoon, near the Pont des Arts, Paris, a body, which appeared lifeless, was taken out of the river. It was that of a young man, twenty years of age, dark-complexioned, and strongly built. The corpse was discolored and cold; the face and lips were swollen and tinged with blue; a thick and yellow froth exuded from the mouth; the eyes were open, fixed, and motionless; the limbs limp and drooping. No pulsation of the heart nor trace of respiration was perceptible. The body had remained under water for a considerable time; the search after it, made in Dr. Bourgeois' presence, lasted fully twenty minutes. That gentleman did not hesitate to incur the derision of the lookers-on, by proceeding to attempt the resurrection of what, in their eyes, was a mere lump of clay. Nevertheless, several hours afterwards, the supposed corpse was restored to life, thanks to the obstinate perseverance of the doctor, who, although strong and enjoying robust health, was several times on the point of losing courage, and abandoning the patient in despair.

But what would have happened if Dr. Bourgeois, instead of persistently remaining stooping over the inanimate body with watchful eye and attentive ear, to catch the first rustling of the heart, had left the drowned man, after half-an-hour's fruitless endeavor, as often happens? The unfortunate young man would have been laid in the grave, although capable of restoration to life! To this case, Dr. Bourgeois, in the Archives de Medicine, adds others, in which individuals who had remained under water as long as six hours were recalled to life by efforts which a weaker conviction than his own would have refrained from making. These facts lead Dr. Londe to the conclusion that, everyday, drowned individuals are buried, who, with greater perseverance, might be restored to life.

Nor is suffocation by foul air and mephitical gas a rare form of death in the United Kingdom. It is possible that suspended animation may now and then have been mistaken for the absolute extinction of life. Dr. Londe gives an instructive case to the purpose. At the extremity of a large grocer's shop, a close, narrow corner, or rather hole, was the sleeping-place of the shopman who managed the night sale till the shop was closed, and who opened the shutters at 4 in the morning. On the 16th of January, 1825, there were loud knocks at the grocer's door. As nobody stirred to open it, the grocer rose himself, grumbling at the shopman's laziness, and proceeding to his sleeping-hole toscold him. He found him motionless in bed, completely deprived of consciousness. Terror-struck by the idea of sudden death, he immediately sent in search of a doctor, who suspected a case of asphyxia by mephitism. His suspicions were confirmed by the sight of a night-lamp, which has gone out although well supplied with oil and wick; and by a portable stove containing the remains of charcoal partly reduced to ashes.

In spite of a severe frost, he immediately had the patient taken into the open air, and kept on a chair in a position as nearly vertical as possible. The limbs of the sufferer hung loose and drooping, the pupils were motionless, with no trace either of breathing or pulsation of the heart or arteries; in short, there were all the signs of death. The most approved modes of restoring animation were persisted in for a long while, without success. At last, about three in the afternoon, that is after *eleven hours* continued exertion, a slight movement was heard in the region of the heart. A few hours afterwards the patient opened his eyes, regained his consciousness, and was able to converse with the spectators attracted by his resurrection. Dr. Londe draws the same conclusions as before; namely, that persons suffocated by mephitism are not unfrequently buried, when they might be saved.

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It has been judiciously remarked that it would be a good plan to spread the knowledge of the sure and certain characteristics which enable us to distinguish every form of lethargy from real death. It cannot be denied that, at the present epoch, the utmost pains are taken to popularise every kind of knowledge. Nevertheless, it makes slow way through the jungles of prejudice and vulgar error. Not long ago, it was over and over again asserted that an infallible mode of ascertaining whether a person were dead or not, was to inflict a burn on the sole of the foot. If a blister full of water resulted, the individual was not dead; if the contrary happened, there was no further hope. This error was unhesitatingly accepted as an item of the popular creed.

The Council of Hygiene, applied to by the Government, indicated putrefaction and cadaverous rigidity as infallible signs of actual death. In respect to the first, putrefaction, a professional man is not likely to make a mistake; but nothing is more possible than for non-professionals to confound hospital rottenness, gangrene, with true *post-mortem* putrefaction. M. de Parville declines to admit it as a test adapted for popular application. Moreover, in winter the time required for putrefaction to manifest itself is extremely uncertain.

The cadaverous rigidity, the stiffness of a corpse, offers an excellent mode of verifying death; but its value and importance are not yet appreciable by everybody, or by the first comer. Cadaverous rigidity occurs a few hours after death; the limbs, hitherto supple, stiffen; and it requires a certain effort to make them bend. But when once the faculty of bending a joint is forcibly restored—to the arm, for instance—it will not stiffen again, but will retain its suppleness. If the death be real, the rigidity is overcome once for all. But if the death be only apparent, the limbs quickly resume, with a sudden and jerking movement, the contracted position which they previously occupied. The stiffness begins at the top, the head, and neck, and descends gradually to the trunk.

These characteristics are very clearly marked; but they must be caught in the fact, and at the moment of their appearance: because, after a time, of variable duration, they disappear. The contraction of the members no longer exists, and the suppleness of the joints returns. Many other symptoms might be added to the above; but they demand still greater clearness of perception, more extended professional knowledge, and more practised habits of observation.

Although the French Government is anxious to enforce throughout the whole empire the rules carried out in Paris, it is to be feared that great difficulties lie in the way. The verification of deaths on so enormous a scale, with strict minuteness, is almost impracticable. But even if it were not, many persons would say:—"Who is to assure us of the correctness of the doctor's observations? Unfortunately, too many terrible examples of their fallibility are on record. The professional man is pressed for time. He pays a passing visit, give a hurried glance, and a fatal mistake is so easily made!" Public opinion will not be reassured until you can show, every time a death occurs, an irrefutable demonstration that life has departed.

M. de Parville now announces the possibility of this great desideratum. He professes to place in any one's hands a self-acting apparatus, which would declare, not only whether the death be real, but would leave in the hands of the experimenter a written proof of the reality of the death. The scheme is this:—It is well known that atrophine—the active principle of belladonna—possesses the property of considerably dilating the pupil of the eye. Oculists constantly make use of it when they want to perform an operation, or to examine the interior of the eye. Now, M. le Docteur Bouchut has shown that atrophine has no action on the pupil when death is real. In a state of lethargy the pupil, under the influence of a few drops of atrophine, dilates in the course of a few minutes; the dilatation also takes place a few instants after death; but it ceases absolutely in a quarter of an hour, or half an hour at the very longest: consequently, the enlargement of the pupil is a certain sign that death is only apparent.

This premised, imagine a little camera-obscura, scarcely so big as an opera-glass, containing a slip of photographic paper, which is kept unrolling for five-and-twenty or thirty minutes by means of clockwork. This apparatus, placed a short distance in front of the dead person's eye, will depict on the paper the pupil of the eye, which will have been previously moistened with a few drops of atrophine. It is evident that, as the paper slides before the eye of the corpse, if the pupil dilate, its photographic image will be dilated; if, on the contrary, it remains unchanged, the image will retain its original size. An inspection of the paper then enables the experimenter to read upon it whether the death is real or apparent only. This sort of declaration can be handed to the civil officer, who will give a permit to bury, in return.

By this simple method a hasty or careless certificate of death becomes impossible. The instrument applies the test and counts the minutes. The doctor and the civil officer are relieved from further responsibility. The paper gives evidence that the verification has actually and carefully been made; for suppose that half an hour is required to produce a test that can be relied on, the length of the strip of paper unrolled marks the time during which the experiment has been continued. An apparatus of the kind might be placed in the hands of the minister or one of the notables of every parish. Such a system would silence the apprehensions of the most timid. Fears—natural enough—would disappear, and the world would be shocked by no fresh cases of premature burial.

A RUSSIAN JESTER.

The London *Athenæum* gives the following notice of a collection of Russian anecdotes relating to Balakireff, the favorite jester of Peter the Great, which have recently been published:—

The name of Peter the Great, as the one Russian sovereign who mingled to an unprecedented extent, both at home and abroad, with men of low degree, is naturally associated with innumerable popular anecdotes, such as are indissolubly intertwined with the memory of James the Fifth of Scotland, Henry the Eighth of England, and "the good Haroun Al-Raschid" of the Thousand and One Nights. In this strange kind of immortality, however, he has a formidable rival in the person of his celebrated jester, from the innumerable stories of whose humor and audacity M. Basistoff has made a judicious and amusing selection. Whether all the broad witticisms and cunning devices related in the volume before us are really to be attributed to Balakireff, or whether, as is more probable, his name has been used merely as a peg whereon to hang certain favorite jokes whose real authors are unknown, matters little; it is sufficient to know that a fair proportion of the stories are unquestionably authentic, and that the remainder, if not true, are at least *ben trovato*. In fact, this famous wag appears to have been one of those persons who are selected by tacit consent to typify a certain genus, and hand down to posterity, under their own name, all the leading characteristics of the class which they represent. In the humor of every nation, as in its graver wisdom, we invariably meet with some "representative man," whose very name forms, as it were, the trade-mark of national wit and sarcasm; and Balakireff, apparently, is to Russia what Joe Miller has been to England, the Laird of Logan to Scotland, Tyll Eulenspiegel to Germany, Nasiredden-el-Khojah to Turkey, and Colonel Crockett to the United States.

All the stories current respecting the Emperor and his favorite redound considerably, as might be expected, to the credit of both parties, exhibiting in the strongest light the native shrewdness of the wit and the frank good nature of the sovereign. Indeed, throughout the entire work, Balakireff appears very much in the character of a spaniel in a lion's cage—admiring, even while mocking, his formidable patron—behaving towards him with a half-waggish, half-affectionate familiarity—perpetually offending, and being perpetually forgiven.

As for the anecdotes themselves, it is sufficiently curious to observe how many of them figure under a slightly altered garb in the literature of other nations and other ages—a fresh proof of the fact that wit, like wisdom, is naturally cosmopolitan. The following is an exact reproduction of the trick by which a certain Macedonian prince of old time was induced to spare a captured garrison which he was about to put to the sword:—

A cousin of Balakireff happened to fall under the displeasure of the Emperor, who delivered him to the authorities for trial, and was just about to ratify their sentence, when Balakireff, hearing of it, made his appearance with a very doleful face, and approached his master as if about to speak. Peter, guessing his errand, turned to the officers who were standing around him, and said in a loud voice:—"I know what petition this fellow is bringing me, but I give you my word of honor, gentlemen, that I will not grant it." The jester, hearing this, instantly threw himself at the feet of the Czar, and said, with the utmost apparent earnestness, "I beseech, Peter Alexeevitch, do *not* pardon that rascal of a cousin of mine!" "Ah, you rogue!" cried Peter, "you're too sharp for me yet, I see!" and the next day the culprit received his pardon.

The anecdote immediately following is one familiar to almost every nation of Europe under one form or another, in which the disguised monarch, meeting with a laborer who expresses a strong desire to see his sovereign in person, offers to gratify his wish, informing him at the same time that he will recognize the great man as being the only one of the company who wears a hat. This is an exact counterpart of the old Scottish tale of James the Fifth and the thresher, and ends with precisely the same exclamation on the part of the astounded countryman:—"It must be either you or I, for all the rest have their hats off!" A little further on in the work occurs another story, wearing at first sight an essentially Russian appearance, but which, strange to say, we have ourselves heard, *mutato nomine*, in one of the western counties of England, from the lips of a man who had certainly never heard of Balakireff, nor, very possibly, of Peter the Great either—One dark night, the Emperor and Balakireff were strolling about one of the less frequented quarters of St. Petersburg, when a brilliant light suddenly shone out in the sky above them. The jester, stopping a passing workman, cried out to him, "Holloa, brother, is that the moon up yonder?"—I'm a stranger here, your honor," replied the man; "better ask some of the townsfolk."

But perhaps the most popular of all the current anecdotes of Balakireff is that of the "transformed sword," a story which we have heard related with infinite gusto by more than one of the jester's countrymen, as a fine instance of that dextrous evation and ready-witted cunning in which they so much delight. Curiously enough, the whole scene (as the readers of Captain Marryat will doubtless remark) is almost identical with one which occurs in "The Pacha of Many Tales;" and Balakireff's ingenious stratagem is precisely the same as that by which Yassuf the water-carrier extricates himself from the dilemma in which he is placed by the Caliph Haroun Al-Raschid. The story is as follows:—

Balakireff, once upon a time, took a sudden fancy to stand sentinel at the gate of the palace, and entreated the permission of his master, who at first only laughed at him, but eventually consented, on condition that the new sentinel should never be found on duty without his sword, which contingency should be held to nullify the agreement. Unfortunately for the credit of our hero, on the very first evening of his new dignity he allowed himself to be overcome with liquor, and was robbed of his treasured weapon by a passing grenadier, who carried it to the Emperor. The latter, feeling confident that he had trapped his wily associate at last, turned out the guard the first thing next morning; when Balakireff, who had meanwhile replaced his lost weapon by a sword of painted wood, put a bold face on the matter, and appeared along with the rest. Thereupon the Czar, pretending to detect some inaccuracy in the equipment of one of the men, began to abuse him violently, and, turning to Balakireff, cried out, "Draw your sword, my friend, and cut that rascal down!" The soldiers knowing how matters stood, were in ecstacies; but the jester was equal to the occasion; he uplifted his hands towards the sky, and exclaimed with the utmost solemnity, "Merciful Lord! I pray thee, turn my sword into a lath!" and at the same moment drawing his sword, a lath it actually proved to be. The guardsmen, notwithstanding the Emperor's presence, could not restrain their laughter; and Peter, delighted with the acuteness of his favorite, gave him a handsome reward.

It is well known that jesters as a class are somewhat apt to presume upon the privileges of their station, and to risk the turning of their jest into earnest; and the last of our friend Balakireff's exploits which is commemorated in the present volume shows clearly enough that he was no exception to the rule. It must be admitted, however, in justice to these versatile gentlemen, that they were, as a rule, not a whit less adroit in getting out of difficulties than in getting into them. The example of Sultan Mahmoud's buffoon, who, on being permitted by his justly offended lord, as a last favor, to select his own mode of death, elected to "die of old age"—and that of the Irish wit, who, when seized by the rebels, and ordered to choose "where he would be hanged," begged to be suspended on a gooseberry bush—are doubtless familiar to every reader; but the device resorted to by Tyll Eulenspiegel in the German legend, when under the sentence of banishment, approaches nearest to the Russian story, and may possibly have suggested the latter, which is not clearly authenticated. M. Basistoff's version runs thus:—

On one occasion Balakireff happened to give serious offense to the Emperor, who, giving way to his rage, angrily ordered him to quit his presence and never dare to appear on Russian soil again. The culprit, with an appearance of great humility, replied that his Majesty should be obeyed, and left the palace forthwith. A few days later, however, the Czar, while sitting at one of the front windows of the palace, was astounded by the sight of his exiled jester seated in a cart, and going quietly past under his very eyes with an air of the most perfect unconcern. Furious at this barefaced transgression of his commands, Peter rushed into the street, and, approaching the culprit with a menacing air, asked "how he dared show himself here, after being forbidden ever to come upon Russian soil again?"—"Gently, gently, Czar of Russia!" answered Balakireff, with an impish chuckle; "this cart-load of earth on which I'm sitting is none of yours; it's all Swedish, every bit of it!" (It must be remembered that this took place at a period when Finland was still a dependency of the Swedish crown.) So saying, the wag coolly pursued his journey; but Peter, who had doubtless had leisure by this time to regret the absence of so diverting a companion, laughed loudly at the evasion, and instantly despatched an officer after him with the promise of a full pardon for all his past offenses.

This literal interpretation of the imperial command reminds us of an old American story, too good not to be quoted. A youngster, who had been detected by his father in the act of stealing some fruit stored for winter consumption, was angrily bidden to "go into the next room, and prepare himself for a severe flogging." Having finished the work which he had in hand, the inexorable parent armed himself with a stout horsewhip and went in quest of the culprit, whom he found ornamented with a hump at which Quasimodo himself would have shuddered. "What on airth have you got on your back?" asked the wondering sire. "A leather apron," replied John, "three double. You told me to prepare myself for a severe flogging, and I guess I've done the best I could!" The father's gravity was not proof against this unexpected translation of his words; the muscles of his face and hand relaxed simultaneously, the whip was let fall, and John escaped for that time with an "admonition."

Altogether, M. Basistoff's work is well worth reading, not merely as exhibiting a characteristic specimen of native humor, but also as affording numerous interesting glimpses of the temper and habits of a ruler whose life was an era, not merely in the history of his own country, but in that of the world.